

On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching¹

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(1937)

Abravanel may be called the last of the Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. He belongs to the Middle Ages, as far as the framework and the main content of his doctrine are concerned. It is true that there are features of his thought which distinguish it from that of all or of most other Jewish medieval philosophers; but most of those features are probably of medieval Christian origin. Yet Abravanel is a son of the humanist age, and thus we shall not be surprised if he expresses in his writings opinions or tendencies which are, to say the least, not characteristic of the Middle Ages. Generally speaking, however, Abravanel is a medieval thinker, a Jewish medieval thinker.

The central figure in the history of Jewish medieval philosophy is Maimonides. Thus it will be advisable to define the character of Abravanel's philosophical tendency by contrasting it with that of Maimonides. One is all the more justified in proceeding thus, since there is scarcely any other philosopher whom Abravanel admired so much, or whom he followed as much, as he did Maimonides.

What was then the general tendency of Maimonides? The answer to this question seems to be obvious: Maimonides attempted to harmonize the teachings of Jewish tradition with the teachings of philosophical tradition, i. e. of the Aristotelian tradition. This answer is certainly not altogether wrong, but it is quite insufficient, since it fails to explain which ultimate assumptions enabled Maimonides to harmonize Judaism and Aristotle. Now those truly decisive assumptions are neither of

¹ I wish to express my thanks to the Board of the Faculty of History for a grant enabling this essay to be written and to Mrs M. C. Blackman for kindly revising the English.

Jewish nor of Aristotelian origin: they are borrowed from Plato, from Plato's political philosophy.

96 At a first glance, the philosophical tradition from which | Maimonides starts seems to be identical with that which is the determining factor of Christian scholasticism. Indeed, to Maimonides as well as to Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle is *the* philosopher. There is, however, one striking and at the same time highly important difference between Maimonides and the Christian scholastic as regards the philosophical tradition on which they build. For Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle is the highest authority, not only in other branches of philosophy, but also in political philosophy. Maimonides, on the other hand, could not use Aristotle's *Politics*, since it had not been translated into Arabic or Hebrew; but he could start, and he did start, from Plato's political philosophy.² For the *Republic* and the *Laws*, which were inaccessible to the Latin Middle Ages,³ had been translated into Arabic in the ninth century, and commentaries on them had been written by two of the most outstanding Islamic philosophers.⁴ By considering these facts we gain, I believe, a clear impression of the philosophical difference which exists between the philosophy of Maimonides (and of his Islamic predecessors) on the one hand, and that of Christian scholasticism on the other: the place occupied in the latter by Aristotle's *Politics* is occupied in the former by Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*. I have read that in some Italian pictures Plato is represented holding in his hand the *Timaeus* and

² For details I must refer the reader for the time being to my book *Philosophie und Gesetz*, Berlin (Schocken), 1935, and to my article »Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maimonide et de Farabi«, *Revue des Études Juives*, 1936, pp. 1–37.

* ³ Cp. Ernest Barker, *Plato and his Predecessors*, p. 383: »For a thousand years the *Republic* has no history; for a thousand years it simply disappeared. From the days of Proclus, the Neo-Platonist of the fifth century, almost until the days of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, at the end of the fifteenth, the *Republic* was practically a lost book.« The same holds true, as far as the Latin Middle Ages are concerned, of the *Laws*.

* ⁴ Farabi's paraphrase of the *Laws* will be edited in the near future by Dr Paul Kraus. The original of Averroes' paraphrase of the *Republic* seems to be lost; but this paraphrase is accessible in an often-printed Latin translation. The more reliable Hebrew translation is being edited by Dr Erwin Rosenthal; see *Journ. Roy. Asiatic Soc.*, October 1934, pp. 737 ff.

Aristotle his *Ethics*. If a pupil of Maimonides or of the Islamic philosophers⁵ had found pleasure in representations | of this kind, he might 97
have chosen rather the inverse order: Aristotle with his *Physics* or *Metaphysics* and Plato with his *Republic* or *Laws*.

For what is the meaning of the fact that Maimonides and the Islamic philosophers whom he followed start from Platonic political philosophy, and not from Aristotle's *Politics*? One cannot avoid raising this question, especially since the circumstance that the *Politics* was not translated into Arabic may well be, not a mere matter of chance, but the result of a deliberate choice, made in the beginning of this medieval development. Now, in order to answer that question, we must remind ourselves of the general character of the medieval world, and of the particular character of the Islamic philosophy adopted by Maimonides. The medieval world is distinguished both from the classical and from the modern world by the fact that its thought was fundamentally determined by the belief in Revelation. Revelation was the determining factor with the Islamic philosophers as well as with the Jewish and Christian philosophers. But, as was clearly recognized by such contemporary and competent observers as Ghazzâli, Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas, the Islamic philosophers did not believe in Revelation properly speaking. They were philosophers in the classical sense of the word: men who would hearken to reason, and to reason only. Consequently, they were compelled to give an account of the Revelation which they had to accept and which they did accept, in terms of human reason. Their task was facilitated by the fact that Revelation, as understood by Jews or Muslims, had the form of law. Revelation, thus understood, lent itself to being interpreted by loyal philosophers as a perfect, ideal law, as an ideal political order. Moreover, the Islamic philosophers were compelled, and so was Maimonides, to justify their pursuit of philosophy before the law to which they were subject; they had, therefore, to prove that the law did not only entitle them, but even oblige them, to devote themselves to 98
philosophy. Consequently, they were driven to interpret Revelation more precisely as an ideal political order, the ideal character of which consists in | the very fact that it lays upon all men endowed with the
necessary qualities the duty of devoting their lives to philosophy, that it awakens them to philosophy, that it holds out for their guidance at least

⁵ When speaking of Islamic philosophers, I am limiting myself strictly to the *falâsifa*, the so-called Aristotelians.

the most important tenets of philosophy. For this purpose they had to assume that the founder of the ideal political order, the prophetic lawgiver, was not merely a statesman, but that he was, at the same time, a philosopher of the highest authority: they had to conceive, and they did conceive, of Moses or Mohammed as philosopher kings. Philosopher kings and a political community governed by philosopher kings were, however, the theme, not of Aristotelian but of Platonic political philosophy. Thus we may say: Maimonides and his Islamic predecessors start from Platonic political philosophy, because they had to conceive of the Revelation to which they were subject, as of an ideal political order, the specific purpose of which was guidance to philosophy. And we may add that their belief in the authority of Moses or Mohammed was perhaps not greatly different from what would have been the belief of a later Greek Platonist in the authority of Plato, if that Platonist had been the citizen of a commonwealth governed by Plato's *Laws*.

Judaism on the one hand, Aristotelianism on the other, certainly supplied the greatest part of the matter of Maimonides' teaching. But Platonic political philosophy provided at any rate the framework for the two achievements by which Maimonides made an epoch in the history of Judaism: for his codification of the Jewish law and for his philosophical defence of the Jewish law. It is open to question which of Plato's political works was the most important for Maimonides and the Islamic philosophers. But it is safe to say that the best clue to the understanding of their teaching is supplied by the *Laws*.⁶ I cannot discuss here the true meaning of this most ironical of Plato's works, although I believe that
 99 only | the full understanding of its true meaning would enable us to understand adequately the medieval philosophy of which I am speaking. For our present purpose, it is sufficient to state that the *Laws* are certainly the primary source of the opinions which Maimonides and his teachers held concerning the relation between philosophy and Revelation, or, more exactly, between philosophy and law. Those opinions may be summarized in the following ways: (1) Law is based on certain fundamental beliefs or dogmas of a strictly philosophical character, and

⁶ E. Barker, *loc. cit.* p. 351, says with regard to the Latin Middle Ages: »The end of the *Laws* is the beginning of the Middle Ages.« This statement is all the more true of the Islamic and Jewish Middle Ages. Compare, for example, the quotations from Avicenna in *Philosophie und Gesetz*, p. 111, and from R. Sheshet in *Revue des Études Juives*, 1936, p. 2, n. 1.

those beliefs are, as it were, the prelude to the whole law. The beliefs of this kind were called by Fârâbî, who was, according to Maimonides, the highest philosophical authority of his period, »opinions of the people of the excellent city«. (2) Law contains, apart from those rational beliefs, a number of other beliefs which, while being not properly true, but representing the truth in a disguised way, are necessary or useful in the interest of the political community. The beliefs of this type may be called, as they were by Spinoza, who was, perhaps, the latest exponent of that medieval tradition, *pia dogmata*, in contradistinction to the *vera dogmata* of the first group.⁷ (3) Necessary beliefs, i.e. the beliefs which are not common to philosophy and law, but peculiar to law as such, are to be defended (either by themselves or together with the whole law) by probable, persuasive, rhetorical arguments, not recognizable as such to the vulgar; a special science is to be devoted to that »defence of the law« or »assistance to the law«.

We are now in a position to define more precisely the character of Maimonides' attempt to harmonize the Jewish tradition with the philosophical tradition. He effects the harmony between those two traditions by starting from the conception of a perfect law, perfect in the sense of Plato's *Laws*, i.e. of a law leading to the study of philosophy and based on philosophical truth, and by thus proving that Judaism is a law of this character. To prove this, he shows that the fundamental beliefs of Judaism are identical with the fundamental tenets of philosophy, i.e. with those tenets | on which an ideal law ought to be based. By showing this, he shows, at the same time, that those Jewish beliefs which are of an unphilosophical nature are meant by the Jewish legislator himself, by *the* philosopher legislator, to be necessary beliefs, i.e. beliefs necessary for political reasons. The assumption underlying this proof of the ideal character of the Jewish law is the opinion that the law has two different meanings: an exterior, literal meaning, addressed to the vulgar, which expresses both the philosophical and the necessary beliefs, and a secret meaning of a purely philosophical nature. Now this property of law had to be imitated by Maimonides in his philosophic interpretation of the law. For if he had distinguished explicitly between true and necessary beliefs, he would have endangered the acceptance of the necessary beliefs on which the authority of the law with the vulgar, i.e. with the great majority, rests. Consequently, he could make this essential distinc-

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⁷ *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, ch. 14 (§ 20, Bruder).

tion only in a disguised way, partly by allusions, partly by the composition of his whole work, but mainly by the rhetorical character, recognizable only to philosophers, of the arguments by which he defends the necessary beliefs. As a consequence, Maimonides' philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, is a most ingenious combination of »opinions of the people of the excellent city«, i.e. of a strictly demonstrative discussion of the beliefs which are common to philosophy and law, with »defence of the law«, i.e. with a rhetorical discussion of the unphilosophical beliefs peculiar to the law. Thus not only the law itself, but also Maimonides' philosophical interpretation of the law, has two different meanings: a literal meaning, addressed to the more unphilosophic reader of philosophic education, which is very near to the traditional Jewish beliefs, and a secret meaning, addressed to true philosophers, which is purely philosophical. This amounts to saying that Maimonides' philosophical work was liable to, and was intended to be liable to, two fundamentally different interpretations: to a »radical« interpretation which did honour to the consistency of his thought, and to a »moderate« interpretation which did honour rather to the fervour of his belief. |

101 The ambiguous nature of Maimonides' philosophical work must be recognized if one wants to judge properly of the general tendency of Abravanel. For Abravanel has to be characterized, to begin with, as a strict, even passionate adherent of the literal interpretation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The more philosophic interpretation of this work had appealed to some earlier commentators. Those commentators, who were under the spell of Islamic philosophy rather than of Christian scholasticism, are vehemently attacked by Abravanel,⁸ who finds words of the highest praise for the Christian scholastics.⁹ But Abravanel accepts the literal teaching of the *Guide* not only as the true expression of Maimonides' thought: that literal teaching is at the same time, if not identical with, at least the framework of, Abravanel's own philosophy.

The beliefs peculiar to the law are founded upon and, as it were, derived from one fundamental conviction: the belief in *creatio ex*

⁸ Cp. his judgements on Ibn Kaspi and others, quoted by Jacob Guttman, *Die religionsphilosophischen Lehren des Isaak Abravanel*, Breslau, 1916, pp. 34–6 and 71.

⁹ See his commentary on Josh. X, 12 (f. 21, col. 2). I have used Abravanel's commentary on Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings in the Frankfort edition of 1736.

nihilo.¹⁰ That belief had been defended by Maimonides in his *Guide* with great care and vigour. The discussion of the creation of the world, or, in other words, the criticism of the contention of the philosophers that the visible world is eternal, forms literally the central part of the *Guide*. It is the central part of this work also because of the fact that the interpretation of the whole work depends on the interpretation of this very part. Indeed, this is the crucial question for the interpretation of Maimonides' philosophical work: whether the discussion of the question of creation expresses Maimonides' own opinion in a direct way, or whether it is in the service of the »defence of the law«. However one may answer this question, the very question itself implies the recognition of the fact that the literal teaching of the *Guide* is most decidedly in favour of the belief in creation. Now | while Maimonides carefully maintains this belief, on which all other beliefs peculiar to the law depend, he takes a rather hesitating, if not self-contradictory position, as regards those other beliefs, i. e. as regards belief in the miracles, in Revelation, in the immortality of the soul, in individual providence, in resurrection. If he actually believed in *creatio ex nihilo*, he was as little under a stringent necessity to depreciate those beliefs, or to restrict their bearing, as were the Christian scholastics, who also had combined Aristotelianism with the belief in creation, and who accepted the Christian dogma as a whole. Abravanel accepted Maimonides' explicit doctrine of the creation as true – he defended it in a special treatise (*Shamayim Ḥadashim*), and he knew Christian scholasticism. It was, therefore, only natural that he should have defended, and that he did defend, on the very basis of Maimonides' doctrine of creation and against his authority, all the other beliefs which are dependent on the belief in creation and which Maimonides had endangered. Thus, his criticism of Maimonides' dangerous doctrines is, in principle, not more than an immanent criticism of the literal teaching of the *Guide*; it is not more than a subsequent correction of that teaching in the sense of the Jewish traditional beliefs. It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that Abravanel's philosophical exertions as a whole are a defence of the Jewish creed, as drawn up by Maimonides in his commentary on the Mishnah, against the implications, dangerous to this creed, of the teaching of the *Guide*.

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The creed compiled by Maimonides was defended expressly by

¹⁰ Cp. Abravanel, *Rosh 'Amanah*, ch. 22, with Maimonides' *Guide*, Pt. II, ch. 25 in the beginning, and Pt. III, ch. 25 in the end.

- 103 Abravanel in a special treatise (*Rosh 'Amanah*). This treatise, by itself perhaps the most striking evidence of the admiration which Abravanel felt for Maimonides, gives us a clear idea both of Abravanel's own tendency and of his interpretation of Maimonides. Maimonides' arrangement of the Jewish beliefs, the so-called »Thirteen Articles of Faith«, had been attacked by some later Jewish writers for philosophical as well as for religious reasons. Abravanel defends Maimonides against those critics by showing that Jewish orthodoxy is perfectly defined by the recognition of just those | thirteen articles which Maimonides had selected, and that the order of those articles is completely lucid. As regards the latter point, Abravanel asserts that the former part of those articles indicates the beliefs common to philosophy and law, while the latter part is concerned with those beliefs which either are not accepted, or which are even contested by the philosophers.¹¹ It is not necessary for our purpose to dwell on the detail of Abravanel's arguments. One point only must be stressed. After having devoted twenty-two chapters to defending Maimonides' compilation, Abravanel rather abruptly explains, in the two concluding chapters of his treatise, that a creed as such is incompatible with the character of Judaism as a divinely given law. For since any and every proposition of the law, any and every story, belief, or command contained in the law, immediately proceeds from
- * Revelation, all those propositions are of equal value, and none of them ought to be thought of as more fundamental than any other. Abravanel does not think that by holding this opinion he is in conflict with the teaching of Maimonides; strangely enough, he asserts that that opinion was shared by Maimonides himself. According to Abravanel, Maimonides selected the thirteen more general articles of belief for the use of the vulgar only, who are unable to grasp the whole doctrine of faith. To prove this statement, he contends that Maimonides mentioned those articles only in his commentary on the Mishnah, i.e. in an elementary work which he wrote in his youth, but not in the *Guide*, in which he treats the philosophy of the Jewish law in a scientific way. Now this contention is not only wrong, but it is contradicted by Abravanel himself. He asserts, in the same treatise,¹² that the articles of belief – the first eleven out of the thirteen explicitly, the last two implicitly – occur as such in the philosophical first part of Maimonides' codification of the

¹¹ *Rosh 'Amanah*, ch. 10.

¹² Ch. 19.

Jewish law (in the *Hilkhoth Yešodhe hat-Torah*); and in another writing of his,¹³ he explains the decisive influence exercised by the articles of belief on the whole composition of the *Guide*. But however this may be, it is certain that Abravanel, by | denying the possibility of distinguishing between fundamental and non-fundamental beliefs, actually undermines the whole structure of the philosophy of the Jewish law which was built up by Maimonides.¹⁴ Abravanel has sometimes been blamed for the inconsistency of his thought. I cannot praise him as a very consistent thinker. But a certain consistency ought not to be denied him. Accepting the literal teaching of Maimonides' *Guide* and trying to correct that teaching in the sense of the traditional Jewish beliefs, he was consistent enough to draw the final conclusion from his premises: he contested, if only occasionally, the foundation on which every philosophy of the law divine ultimately rests. However deeply he may have been influenced by the philosophical tradition in general and by the philosophical teaching of Maimonides in particular, his thought was decisively determined, not by philosophy, but by Judaism as a tradition based on a verbally inspired revelation. * 104

The unphilosophic, to some extent even anti-philosophic, traditionalism of Abravanel accounts for the fact that for him political philosophy loses the central importance which it had for Maimonides. From what has been said about Maimonides' philosophy of Judaism, it will have appeared that the significance which he actually attaches to political philosophy is in exact proportion to his rationalism: identifying the fundamental beliefs of Judaism with the fundamental tenets of philosophy means at the same time interpreting the beliefs peculiar to Judaism in terms of political philosophy; and it means, in principle, interpreting Judaism as a whole as a perfect law in the Platonic sense. Accordingly, a follower of Maimonides, who rejected the thoroughgoing rationalism of the latter, as did Abravanel, deprived by this very fact political philosophy of all its dignity. One cannot raise the objection against this assertion that the Christian scholastics, | while far from * 105

¹³ *Ma'amar Qāṣēr b'e Bhi'ur Šōdh ham-Moreh*.

¹⁴ Cp. in this connection, Abravanel's criticism of Maimonides' explanation of the Mosaic laws; see his commentary on I Kings III, 14 (f. 210, col. 2) and his commentary on Deut. XII, 28 (f. 286, col. 4). (I have used Abravanel's commentary on the Pentateuch in the Hanau edition of 1710.) Cp. also his criticism of Gersonides' method of drawing maxims out of the biblical narratives in the introduction to the commentary on Joshua (f. 5, col. 2).

being radical rationalists, did indeed cultivate political philosophy. For the case of those scholastics who were citizens of existing states was obviously quite different from the case of the Jewish medieval thinkers. For a medieval Jew, political philosophy could have no other field of application than the Jewish law. Consequently, the value which political philosophy could have for him was entirely dependent on how far he would accept philosophy in general and political philosophy in particular as a clue to the understanding of the Jewish law. Now according to Maimonides, the prophet, who brought the law, is a philosopher statesman, and at least the greater part of the Mosaic law is concerned with the »government of the city«.¹⁵ Abravanel, on the other hand, denies that philosophy in general is of the essence of prophecy. As regards political philosophy in particular, he declares that the prophet does not stoop to such »low« things as politics and economics. He stresses in this connection the fact that the originator of the biblical organization of jurisdiction was not Moses, but Jethro.¹⁶ In making these statements, Abravanel does not contest that Moses, as well as the other prophets, exercised a kind of government. As we shall see later, he even asserts this expressly. But he obviously does not accept the view, presupposed by Maimonides, that prophetic government is a legitimate subject of political philosophy. Political philosophy, as he understands it, has a much more restricted field than it had for Maimonides; it is much more of the Aristotelian than of the Platonic type.¹⁷ Abravanel's depreciation of political philosophy, which is a consequence of his critical attitude towards Maimonides' rationalism, thus implies a decisive limitation of the content of political philosophy.

106 Political philosophy, as outlined by Maimonides, had dealt with three main topics: the prophet, the king and the | Messiah. According to Maimonides, the prophet as such is a philosopher statesman, and the highest prophet, Moses, was that philosopher statesman who was able

¹⁵ *Guide*, Pt. III, ch. 27–28.

¹⁶ Commentary on I Kings III, 14 (f. 211, col. 1). Cp. however the commentary on Exod. XVIII, 13–27 (f. 134, col. 2–3).

¹⁷ As regards Abravanel's knowledge of Aristotle's *Politics*, see J. F. Baer, »Don Jizchaq Abravanel«, *Tarbiz*, VIII, p. 241 f., 245 n. 11 and 248. See also below, p. 113, n. 2. In his commentary on Gen. X, 1 ff. (f. 40, col. 1) Abravanel seems occasionally to adopt the Aristotelian doctrine of natural masters and servants.

to give the perfect, and consequently eternal, unchangeable law.¹⁸ As regards kingship, Maimonides teaches that the institution of a king is indispensable, and expressly commanded by the Mosaic law. The king is subordinate to the lawgiver; his function is to force men to obedience to the law, to establish justice and to be the military leader. He himself is bound by the law and, therefore, subject both to punishment in case of transgression of the law and to instruction by the supreme court, the guardians of the law. The king has extraordinary powers in case of urgent necessity, and his claims both to honour and to glory are acknowledged by the law.¹⁹ The Messiah, as Maimonides conceives of him, is, in the first instance, a king, obedient to the law, and a successful military leader, who will rescue Israel from servitude, restore the kingdom of David in the country of Israel, establish universal peace, and thus create, for the first time in history, the ideal earthly condition for a life devoted to knowledge. But the Messiah is not only a king; he is, at the same time, a prophet of a rank not much inferior to that of the lawgiver Moses: the Messiah, too, is a philosopher king. Even according to the literal teaching of Maimonides, the Messiah does not work miracles, and the Messianic age in general does not witness any alteration of the ordinary course of nature. It goes almost without saying that that age is not the prelude to the end of the visible world: the present world will remain in existence for ever.²⁰ Thus we may define the distinctive features of Maimonides' Messianology by saying that Messianism, as he accepts it, is a rational hope rather than a superrational belief.²¹ Maimonides' rationalism accounts in particular for the fact that he stresses so strongly the character of the Messiah as a successful military leader – he does this most definitely by inserting his thematic treatment of Messianology within that section of his great legal work which deals with »the kings and their wars«. For military ability or deficiency seems to be the decisive natural reason for the rise or decline of states. Maimonides, at any rate, thinks that the reason for the

¹⁸ Cp. *Guide*, Pt. I, ch. 54, with Pt. II, ch. 39–40.

¹⁹ See *Guide*, Pt. II, ch. 40; Pt. III, ch. 41 (Munk, p. 91 a) and ch. 45 (Munk, p. 98 b) as well as *Hilkhoth Melakhim*, ch. 1, §§ 3 and 8; ch. 3 *passim*; ch. 4, § 10 and ch. 5, § 2.

²⁰ *Hilkhoth Melakhim*, ch. 11–12; *Hilkhoth Teshubah*, ch. 9; *Guide*, Pt. II, ch. 29.

²¹ Notice the distinction between »belief« and »hope« in *Hilkhoth Melakhim*, ch. 11, § 1.

- * destruction of the Jewish state in the past was the neglect of the arts of war and conquest.²² Accordingly, he expects that military virtue and military ability will play a decisive part in the future restoration of the Jewish state.²³

It is a necessary consequence of Abravanel's anti-rationalist premises that he must exclude the two most exalted topics of Maimonides' political philosophy from the field of political philosophy, properly speaking, altogether. As regards the prophets, the prophetic lawgiver and the law divine, he takes away their treatment from political philosophy by contesting the assertions of Maimonides that prophecy is a natural phenomenon,²⁴ and that philosophy belongs to the essence of prophecy.²⁵ For, by denying this, he destroys the foundation of Maimonides' conception of the prophet as a philosopher statesman. The leadership of the prophet, as Abravanel sees it, is, just as prophecy itself is, of an essentially supernatural, and thus of an essentially superpolitical character. As regards the Messiah, Abravanel devoted to this theme a much more detailed and a much more passionate treatment than

108 Maimonides had done.²⁶ Indeed, as we are informed by a | most competent historian, Abravanel stressed in his writings the Messianic hopes more than any other Jewish medieval author, and he was the first to give the Messianic beliefs of Israel a systematic form.²⁷ This increase of the interest in eschatological speculation is explained by the fact that Abravanel was a contemporary of the greatest revolutions in the history of the Jewish diaspora, and of that great revolution of European

²² See his letter to the community at Marseilles.

* ²³ I am not competent to judge whether Maimonides' legal treatment of kings and wars is influenced by the Islamic conception of the Holy War. But it is certain that his stressing the importance of military virtue in his philosophic prophetology was influenced by the prophetology of the Islamic philosophers, who attach a much higher value to war and to the virtue of courage than Plato and Aristotle had done. Cp. *Revue des Études Juives*, 1936, pp. 19 f. and 35 f.

²⁴ See Abravanel's commentary on *Guide*, Pt. II, ch. 32.

²⁵ See, for example, commentary on I Kings III, 14 (f. 210, col. 4).

* ²⁶ In this connection, the fact has to be mentioned that some prophecies which, according to Maimonides, were fulfilled in the past, i.e. at a time comparatively near to their announcement, are interpreted by Abravanel as Messianic prophecies. Cp. the interpretation given in *Guide*, Pt. II, ch. 29, of Isa. XXIV, 17 ff. and Joel III, 3–5, with Abravanel's explanations of those passages in his commentary on the later prophets.

²⁷ Baer, *loc. cit.* pp. 257–9.

civilization which is called the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern period. Abravanel expected the coming of the Messiah in the near future. He saw signs of its imminence in all the characteristic features of his time, from the increase of heresies and unbelief down to the appearance of the »French disease«.²⁸ Reflections of this kind show that his Messianistic view was not, as was, at least to some extent, that of Maimonides, of an evolutionist, but of a catastrophic character. It is hardly necessary to add that the Messianic age is for Abravanel a period rich in miracles, the most impressive of them being the resurrection of the dead. That age, which is the age of universal peace, even among the animals, as predicted by Isaiah, lasts only for a limited time; it is followed by the end of the present world.²⁹ It is preceded by a most terrible war, the final war. That war is, however, not so much a war of liberation, fought and won by Israel as Maimonides had taught; it is rather an event like the capture of Jericho, as told in the book of Joshua: Israel is a looker-on at the victory rather than the victor.³⁰ Accordingly, in Abravanel's description of the Messiah,³¹ the military abilities and virtues are, to say the least, not predominant.³² To him, the Messiah is certainly much more a | worker of miracles than a military leader: the Messiah, not less than the prophets, belongs to the sphere of miracles, not of politics. Abravanel's Messianology as well as his prophetology are essentially unpolitical doctrines.³³

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²⁸ That disease is, according to Abravanel, probably meant in Zech. XIV, 12 (see his commentary on that passage).

²⁹ See G. Scholem's remark in *Encyc. Judaica*, IX, col. 688.

³⁰ The »realistic« element of Abravanel's conception of the final war, i.e. his identification of the final war with the war which he thought to be imminent between the Christian nations of Europe and the Turks for Palestine, does not change the character of his conception as a whole.

³¹ See his commentary on Isa. XI.

³² Those qualities, I venture to suggest, are ascribed by Abravanel not so much to *the* Messiah (i.e. the Messiah ben David) as to the Messiah ben Joseph, a Midrashic figure, not mentioned by Maimonides.

³³ Restating the genuine teaching of the Bible against Maimonides' rationalistic and therefore political teaching, Abravanel goes sometimes farther in the opposite direction than does the Bible itself. The most striking example of this which occurs to me is his interpretation of Judges I, 19: Judah »could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron«. Abravanel explains this passage in the following way: »Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, *not* because they had chariots of iron.«

As regards the difference between Maimonides' political teaching and

Now these unpolitical doctrines belong, as it were, to the framework of what Abravanel himself would have called his political teaching, i. e. of his discussion of the best form of human government as distinguished from divine government. Since the unpolitical framework was to Abravanel doubtless incomparably more important than its political content, and since, besides, the understanding of the former is indispensable for the right appreciation of the latter, it will be proper for us to describe the background of his political teaching somewhat more exactly than we have done up to now. That background is not only of an unpolitical, but even of an antipolitical character. As has been shown recently by Professor Baer,³⁴ Abravanel takes over from Seneca's 90th letter the criticism there developed of human civilization in general (of the |
 110 »artificial« and »superfluous« things) and of the city in particular. Following Josephus and the Christian Fathers, he combines that Hellenistic teaching with the teaching, in important respects similar, of the first chapters of Genesis. He conceives of urban life and of coercive government, as well as of private property, as productions of human rebellion

Abravanel's unpolitical teaching, I have to emphasize the following example. According to Maimonides, the main reason for the fact (told in Exod. XIII, 17f.) that God did not lead Israel on the direct way, through Philistia, to Palestine, was His intention of educating them in courage (*Guide*, Pt. III, ch. 24, p. 53 a, and ch. 32, pp. 70 b–71 a); according to Abravanel, on the other hand, the main reason was His intention to divide the sea for Israel and to drown the Egyptians (and there was no sea on the way through Philistia); see commentary on the passage (f. 125, cols. 1–2).

³⁴ *Loc. cit.* pp. 248–53. I have to make only some slight additions to the ample evidence adduced by Baer. (a) Abravanel's description of the innocent life in the first period as a life »in the field« (Baer, p. 252) is literally taken over from Seneca, ep. 90 (§ 42, *agreste domicilium*). (b) Abravanel uses in his commentary on Gen. XI, 1 ff. (f. 42, col. 2) the doctrine of Poseidonios, discussed by Seneca, of the government of the best and wisest men in the Golden Age, in a modified form; he says that in the first period of the world, Divine Providence extended itself without any intermediary over mankind, and that, therefore, there were then always wise men, versed in theology. Cp. also Seneca, ep. 90, 44. (c) The criticism of Cain as the first founder of the city (Baer, 251) is to be found also in Josephus, *Ant.* 1, § 62. (d) Abravanel uses the general criticism of civilization | most properly in his interpretation of Exod. XX, 25 (f. 143,
 110 col. 1). (e) The distinction between the three ways of life (the bestial, the political, and the theoretical life) (Baer, 251) is obviously taken from Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1095 b, 17 ff. That distinction had been applied to the three sons of Adam, in the same way as it is by Abravanel, by Maimonides; see *Guide*, Pt. II, ch. 30 and Ephodi's commentary.

against the natural order instituted by God: the only life in accordance with nature is a state of liberty and equality of all men, and the possession in common of the natural goods, or, as he seems to suggest at another place,³⁵ the life »in the field«, of independent families. This criticism of all political, »artificial« life does not mean that Abravanel intends to replace the conception of the city as of something »artificial« by the conception of the nation as of something »natural«; for, according to Abravanel, the existence of nations, i.e. the disruption of the one human race into a plurality of nations, is not less »artificial«, not less a result of sin, than is the existence of cities.³⁶ Thus, his criticism of political organization is truly all-comprehensive. And the ultimate reason of this anti-political view is Abravanel's anti-rationalism, the predominance in his thought of the belief in miracles. It is true he accepts the classical teaching of man's »natural« way of life in the beginning, in the Golden Age. But that »natural« state is understood by Abravanel to be of an essentially miraculous character.³⁷ It is highly significant that he finds an analogy of man's »natural« state in the life led by Israel in the desert,³⁸ where Israel had to rely entirely for everything | on miraculous

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providence. Abravanel, as it were, interprets the »life in the fields«, praised by Seneca and the *Bucolics*, in the spirit of Jeremiah's words (II, 2): »I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.« The »natural« state of mankind is in principle not less miraculous than the Messianic age in which that natural state is to be restored. Maimonides, who held, to say the least, a rather hesitating attitude towards miracles, had adopted, without making any reservation apart from those made by Aristotle himself, the Aristotelian principle that man is naturally a political being; Abravanel, on the other hand, who unhesitatingly accepts all the miracles of the past and of the future,

³⁵ Commentary on Gen. XI, 1 ff. (f. 41, cols. 1–2).

³⁶ *Ibid.* (f. 42, cols. 1–2). According to Abravanel's usage, »nation« often has the meaning of »religious community«; he speaks, for example, of the »Christian nation« (see e.g. *Ma'yene hay-Yeshu'ah*, XI, 8, and commentary on I Kings XV, 6, f. 250, col. 3).

³⁷ Cp. p. 109, n. 34*b* above, with commentary on Josh. X, 12 (f. 21, col. 3).

³⁸ Commentary on Gen. XI, 1 ff. (f. 41, col. 3). Cp. also commentary on Exod. XVIII, 13–27 (f. 134, col. 2) on the connection between the absence of slavery among the Israelites while they were wandering through the desert (i.e. between their being then in a state of »natural« equality) and their miraculous maintenance by the manna.

judges of man's political existence as being sinful in its origin, and not instituted, but only, as it were, reluctantly conceded to man, by God.³⁹ And, he goes on to say, it is with the political and urban life as with the king.⁴⁰ That is to say, Abravanel's political teaching, his discussion of the value of monarchy, or, more generally, of the best form of human government, to which I am turning now, is only an application, if the most interesting application, of his fundamental conception, which is strictly anti-political.

Abravanel deals with the question of the best form of human government in his commentaries both on Deut. XVII, 14f., i.e. on the law which seems to command to Israel the institution of a king, and to I Sam. VIII, 6f., i.e. on the narration that God and the prophet Samuel were offended by the fact that Israel did ask Samuel for a king.⁴¹ The question is for Abravanel thus primarily an exegetical one: how are the two apparently opposed passages of the Bible to be reconciled? Proceeding | in the scholastic way, Abravanel begins with surveying and criticizing the earlier attempts, made by Jews and Christians,⁴² to solve that exegetical problem. He shows that all those attempts, in spite of their divergencies, and apart from the individual deficiencies of each of them, are based on one and the same decisive assumption. All the earlier commentators mentioned by Abravanel assumed that Israel's asking for a king was a sin, not as such, but only because of the manner or

³⁹ Bound by Gen. II, 18, however, he occasionally adopts that Aristotelian proposition. See Baer, *loc. cit.* pp. 249 f.

⁴⁰ Commentary on Gen. XI, 1 ff. (f. 41, col. 3).

⁴¹ The treatment of the question is in both versions (in the earlier version in the commentary on I Sam. VIII, 6f. (f. 91, col. 2 – f. 93, col. 4), and in the later version in the commentary on Deut. XVII, 14f. (f. 295, col. 2 – f. 296, col. 2)) identical as regards the tendency, and even, to a large extent, literally identical. The earlier version is the more important as regards the details of the criticism of kingship; but only the later version provides us with an insight into Abravanel's conception of the ideal government as a whole: his explanation of Deut. XVII, 14f. is only the continuation of his statements concerning the government of the Jewish nation in general, which are to be found | in his interpretation of Deut. XVI, 18ff. These statements have not been taken into account by Baer, nor by Ephraim E. Urbach, »Die Staatsauffassung des Don Isaak Abrabanel«, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1937, pp. 257–70, who come, therefore, to conclusions more or less different from those set forth in the present article.

⁴² The three opinions of Christian commentators, which are dealt with in the earlier version, are not, however, discussed in the later version.

circumstances of their demand. In other words, those commentators presupposed that Deut. XVII, 14f. expresses a Divine command to institute a king. This, however, includes the further presupposition that monarchy is a good, nay, that it is the best form of human government; for God would not have given His nation any political constitution but the best. Consequently, Abravanel has to discuss first whether monarchy is indeed the best form of human government, and secondly, whether the meaning of Deut. XVII, 14f. is that Israel is commanded to institute a king.

The first discussion is a criticism, based on reason only, of the monarchist teaching of *the* philosophers, i.e. of Aristotle⁴³ and his medieval followers. That discussion is, unfortunately, far from being of scholastic orderliness and precision.⁴⁴ But the main argument is quite clear. The philosophers who are criticized by Abravanel asserted the necessity of monarchic government by comparing the relation of the king to the political community with the relation of the heart to the human body, and with the relation of the First Cause to the universe.⁴⁵ Against such kinds of proof Abravanel objects that | they are based on a
μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος, on a μετάβασις from things natural and
necessary to things merely possible and subject to the human will. Those
philosophers tried, further, to prove the necessity of monarchic govern-
ment by contending that the three indispensable conditions of well-
ordered government are fulfilled only in a monarchy. Those conditions
are: unity, continuity, and absolute power. As regards unity, Abravanel
states that it may well be achieved by the consent of many governors.⁴⁶

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⁴³ See commentary on I Sam. VIII, 6f. (f. 92, col. 1).

⁴⁴ It has been made somewhat more lucid in the later version.

⁴⁵ Those comparisons were known to Abravanel not only from Christian sources, but also and primarily from Jewish and Islamic ones. In his commentary on Exod. XVIII, 13–27 (f. 134, col. 2) he expressly refers to Fârâbî's *Principles of the beings* (i.e. to the Hebrew translation of *k. al-siyyâsât al-madaniyya*) | as proving the necessity of hierarchy leading up to one chief, and in the sentence immediately following that reference, he mentions the examples of the hierarchy in the human body, and of the universal hierarchy which leads up to the First Cause. (Cp. Fârâbî, *loc. cit.* ed. Hyderabad, 1346 A.H., p. 54, and *Musterstaat*, ed. Dieterici, pp. 54ff. See also Maimonides, *Guide*, Pt. I, ch. 72.) In the passage mentioned, Abravanel accepts those examples and the monarchist consequence derived from them, while he rejects them in his commentary on Deut. XVII, 14f. and on I Sam. VIII, 6f.

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⁴⁶ Cp. Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, lib. I, cap. 15, § 2.

As regards continuity, he doubts whether the annual change of governors, who have to answer for their conduct of public affairs after the expiration of their office, and who are, therefore, restrained by »fear of flesh and blood« (*Mora' Basar wa-Dham*) and by their being ashamed of their crimes becoming publicly denounced and punished, is not much to be preferred to the irresponsible, though continuous, government of one. As regards absolute power, Abravanel denies altogether that it is indispensable or desirable: the power of the governors ought to be limited by the laws. He adduces, further, in favour of the government of many, the principle of majority, as accepted by the Jewish law in matters of the interpretation of the law, and the statement made by Aristotle »in the beginning of the *Metaphysics*« that the truth is more easily reached by the collaboration of many than by the exertions of one.⁴⁷ After having thus disposed of the philosophic arguments in favour of monarchy, Abravanel turns to the teaching of experience; for, as Aristotle »has taught us«, »experience prevails over the syllogism«. Now the experience | of the present shows that such states as Venice, Florence,⁴⁸ Genoa, Lucca, Siena, Bologna and others, which are governed, not by monarchs, but by »judges« elected for limited periods of office, are much superior to the monarchies, as regards both administration of justice and military achievements. And the experience of the past teaches

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⁴⁷ The passage which Abravanel has in mind is the beginning of A ḥl. (993 a, 30 ff.). I wonder why he did not quote such more suitable passages as *Politics*, III, 16 (1287 b), and VII, 14 (1332 b–1333 a). It may be that he knew the *Politics* only from quotations.

⁴⁸ Cp. Lionardo Bruni's *Oratio in funere Nannis Strozae* (in Baluzius, *Miscellanea*, III, pp. 230 ff.): »Forma reipublicae gubernandae utimur ad libertatem paritatemque civium maxime omnium directa: quae quia aequalissima in omnibus est, popularis nuncupatur. Neminem unum quasi dominum horremus, non paucorum potentiae inservimus. ... Monarchiae laus veluti ficta quaedam et umbratilis (est), non autem expressa et solida. ... Nec multum secus accidit in dominatu paucorum. Ita popularis una relinquitur legitima reipublicae gubernandae forma, in qua libertas vera sit, in qua aequitas juris cunctis pariter civibus, in qua virtutum studia vigere absque suspitione possint. ... Ingeniis vero ac intelligentia sic valent cives nostri ut in ea quidem laude pares non multi, qui vero antepoenendi sint, nulli reperiantur. Acritas quidem inest atque industria, et in rebus agendis celeritas et agilitas, animique magnitudo rebus sufficiens. Nec in moderanda republica solum nec in domestica tantum disciplina ... valemus, sed etiam bellica gloria insignes sumus. Nam majores quidem nostri ... finitimos omnes populos virtute bellica superarunt. ... Nostra semper civitas ... scientissimos rei militaris duces procreavit.«

that Rome, when governed by Consuls, conquered the world, while it declined under the emperors. In eloquent sentences which betray a deep hatred of kings and their ways, Abravanel contrasts the admirable character of classical or modern republics with the horrors of monarchies. He arrives at the conclusion that the existence of a king is not only not necessary for a political community, but that it is even an enormous danger and a great harm to it, and that the origin of kingdoms is not the free election of the king by the people, but force and violence.⁴⁹

In spite of his strong indictment of monarchic government, | Abravanel no less strongly contends that, if in a country a monarchy exists, the subjects are bound to strict obedience to the king. He informs us that he has not seen in the writings of Jews a discussion of the question whether the people has the right to rebel against the king, or to depose him in case the king becomes a tyrant, and that the Christian scholars who did discuss that question, decided that the people had such a right, according to the classical precedent of the defection of the ten tribes from Rehoboam. Abravanel, who had spoken about this subject »before kings with their wise men«, judges that the people has no right to rebellion or deposition, even if the king commits every crime. For the people has, when crowning the king, made a covenant with him by which it promised to him obedience; »and that covenant and oath was not conditional, but absolute; and, therefore, he who rebels against the king is guilty of death, whether the king is righteous or wicked; for it is not the people that inquires into the king's righteousness or wickedness«. Besides, the king represents God; he is an image of God as regards both absolute power (the extra-legal actions of the king correspond to the miracles) and unity (the king is unique in his kingdom, as God is

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⁴⁹ Cp. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, lib. IV, cap. 11: »Regum scrutare historiam, ad hoc petitem regem a Deo invenies, ut praecederet faciem populi. ... Qui tamen non fuerat necessarius, nisi et Israel praevaricatus esset in similitudinem gentium, ut Deo rege sibi non videretur esse contentus. ... Hospitem meum Placentinum dixisse recolo ... hoc in civitatibus Italiae usu frequenti celeberrimum esse, quod dum pacem diligunt, et iustitiam colunt, et periuriis abstinunt, tantae libertatis et pacis gaudio perfruuntur, quod nihil est omnino, quod vel in minimo quietem eorum concutiat. ... Adiciebat etiam quod merita populi omnem evacuant principatum, aut eum faciunt esse mitissimum. ...« *Ibid.* lib. VIII, cap. 17: »Nisi enim iniquitas, et iniustitia ... tyrannidem procurasset, omnino regna non essent, quae ... iniquitas aut per se praesumpsit, aut extorsit a domino.«

unique in His universe). The king is, therefore, entitled to a kind of honour which has something in common with the honour owed by man to God. Consequently, any attempt on the side of the people to depose or to punish their king, is in a sense sacrilegious.⁵⁰ It is obvious that the second argument is contradictory to the assertions made by Abravanel two or three pages earlier, in his discussion of the value of monarchy. It would, however, be unfair perhaps to so prolific a writer as Abravanel, to attach too much stress to his inconsistencies; and in particular to the present inconsistency.⁵¹ For if the second argument used | by him in support of his thesis, that the people has no right to depose or punish a tyrannous king, is inconsistent with his denial of the value of monarchy, the thesis itself is perfectly consistent with his main contention, that monarchy, as such, is an enormous danger and a great evil.

Was, then, the political ideal of Abravanel the republic? He does not use a word which could be translated by »republic«; the kind of government which he praises is called by him government of »many«. This is very vague indeed. The statements occurring in his criticism of monarchy might convey the impression that his ideal was democracy. But, as we shall see later, he accepted the doctrine of the necessity of a »mixed« constitution. Thus, his ideal cannot have been a »pure« constitution of any kind. I believe we would not be wide of the mark if we defined his political ideal by saying that it was, like that of Calvin⁵² one or two generations later, an »aristocracy near to democracy«.⁵³ But in order to avoid any hypothesis, we shall do best to confine ourselves to

⁵⁰ Commentary on Deut. XVII, 16–20 (f. 296, col. 4 – f. 297, col. 1). Abravanel further adduces a third argument which, however, applies to Jewish kings only. Cp. also his commentaries on Judges IV, 9 (f. 46, col. 1); on I Kings II, 37 (f. 202, col. 3); on I Kings XIII, 2 (f. 246, col. 1); and on I Kings XII *passim*.

⁵¹ Cp. also above, p. 112, n. 45. Another example of this kind of inconsistency may be mentioned in passing. In his commentary on I Sam. VIII, 7 (f. 93, col. 4), | i.e. only two or three pages after he had finished the proof that the existence of a king is not necessary in any nation, Abravanel says: »the king is necessary for the other nations« (for all nations except Israel).

⁵² *Institutio*, lib. IV, cap. 20, § 8 (with regard to the Jewish commonwealth).

⁵³ The aristocratic element in the ideal constitution, as conceived by Abravanel, i.e. of the Jewish constitution, is the *Synhedrion* of 70. Cp. also commentary on Exod. XVIII, 13–27 (f. 134, col. 3). Abravanel's ideal is characterized as »*status aristocraticus*« by Menasseh ben Israel, *Conciliator*, qu. 6, ad Deut. (Frankfort, 1633, p. 227).

the statement that Abravanel's political ideal was the republic. For »republic« is a term of a polemic and negative character; it does not say more than »not monarchy«, without defining whether that non-monarchical government desired is democratic, aristocratic, oligarchic, and so on.⁵⁴ And what Abravanel says of the best form of human government is hardly more than just this: that it is unmonarchical.

But was the political ideal of Abravanel really the republican city-state? That this was the case is most unlikely from the outset. If it were the case, it would betray not only inconsistency – inconsistent Abravanel admittedly was – but even an almost insane looseness of thought. Indeed, it is | inconceivable that the very man who, in accordance with his deepest theological convictions, judged the city to be the work of human wickedness, should have been at the same time a genuine and unreserved admirer of the worldly greatness of Rome and Venice. One cannot explain the contradiction by supposing that Abravanel was merely a humanist orator who was able to devote eloquent sentences to any subject. For, eloquent though he could be, he certainly was no sophist: he had a strong and sincere belief in the one truth. The only possible explanation is that Abravanel's admiration for the classical and modern city-states was not more than a tribute which he paid to the fashion of his time; that it was a sidetrack into which he was guided occasionally, if on more than one occasion, by the influence of humanism, but primarily by his disgust at kings and their worldly splendour, which had a deeper root than the humanist influence.

Before beginning to define the true character of Abravanel's political ideal, let us emphasize the fact that the exaltation of the republican city-state belongs to the discussion, based on reason only, of the best form of human government, i. e. to a mere prelude to the central discussion of it, which is based on the Scripture only. After what has been said about Abravanel's philosophical tendency, there is no need for a further proof of the assertion that only his interpretation of the teaching of the Scripture can provide us with his authentic conception of the ideal form of human government. What, then, does the Scripture teach concerning the human government of Israel?

This question is answered by Abravanel both precisely and lucidly. He begins by stating his thesis, which runs as follows: Even if he granted that the king is useful and necessary in all other nations for the ordering

⁵⁴ Cp. Montesquieu's definition in *De l'esprit des lois*, livre II, ch. 1.

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of the political community and for its protection – which, however, he does not grant, but even vigorously denies – even in that case the king would certainly not be necessary for the Jewish nation. For their king is God, and, therefore, they need, even incomparably less than the other nations, a king of flesh and blood. A king could be necessary for three purposes: for military leadership, for legislation, and for extraordinary power to punish | the wicked. All those purposes are achieved in Israel in the most perfect way by God, who vouchsafes His particular providence to His elected nation. Thus, a king is not necessary in Israel. He is even most dangerous in Israel. Experience has shown that all the kings of Israel and most of the kings of Judah led Israel and Judah into idolatry, while the judges and the prophets were, all of them, godfearing men. This proves that the leadership of »judges« is good, while that of kings is bad. The result, at which the discussion based on reason only had arrived, is confirmed by the scrutiny of the Scripture, and particularly of the biblical narratives. More exactly, that result has undergone, as a consequence of the scrutiny of the Bible, an important precision, which is, at the same time, an important correction: the ideal form of human government is not the republic as such, but a »republican« government, instituted and guided by God.⁵⁵

Arrived at this point, Abravanel has yet to overcome the greatest difficulty. The earlier Jewish commentators, whose views he had criticized to begin with, were no less familiar with the innumerable passages of the Bible which attribute the kingship to God, than he himself was. They also remembered, no less well than he did, the evil which Israel and Judah had experienced under their wicked kings. But they remembered also the deeds and words of such godfearing kings as David, the author of many Psalms, as Solomon, the author of the Song of Songs, and as Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah, who were »saints of the Highest«.⁵⁶ And, even more important than this, the Messiah for whose speedy coming they prayed, was conceived of by them as a king. Now, as regards the last point, Abravanel was consistent enough to deny that the Messiah is a king properly speaking: the Messiah, too, is, according to him, not a king, but a prophet and a judge.⁵⁷ But this conception of the leadership

⁵⁵ See also Urbach, *loc. cit.* pp. 263 f.

⁵⁶ Cp. Abravanel's Introduction to his commentary on the Books of the Kings (f. 188, col. 3).

⁵⁷ See Baer, *loc. cit.* p. 259.

of the Messiah is already based on the truly decisive assumption | that the institution of a king in Israel was not expressly commanded by God. The earlier commentators were convinced that Deut. XVII, 14f. did express such a command. As long as the difficulty offered by that passage was not overcome, all other passages of the Bible which Abravanel might adduce in support of his thesis were of little weight. For none of those other passages contained a definite law concerning the institution of kingship in Israel.

Abravanel denies that Deut. XVII, 14f. expresses a command to institute a king in Israel. According to him, that passage merely gives permission to do this. We need not examine whether his interpretation is right or not. What matters for us is, that the interpretation rejected by Abravanel was accepted as legally binding by Jewish tradition, which was, as a rule, decidedly in favour of monarchy. The traditional interpretation had been accepted in particular by Maimonides, who had embodied it in his great legal work as well as in his *Sepher ham-Misvot*.⁵⁸

According to the interpretation accepted by the Jewish tradition, Deut. XVII, 14f. would have to be translated as follows: »When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein; and shalt | say (or:⁵⁹ *then thou shalt*

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⁵⁸ It was accepted also, for example, by Nahmanides, Moses of Coucy, Gersonides, and Bachya ben Asher. (This is not to deny that Gersonides' and Bachya's statements in their commentaries on Deut. XVII, 14f. are almost as much anti-monarchistic as those of Abravanel – there are a number of important literal concords between the statements of Abravanel and those of both Gersonides and Bachya – but still, both of them interpret the passage in question as conveying a command to institute a king.) As far as I know, the only Jewish medieval commentator who, in his commentary on Deut. XVII, 14ff., expressly understands that passage as conveying a permission is Ibn Ezra. The exceptional character of Abravanel's interpretation is implicitly recognized by Moses Hayyim Alshekh (*Mar'oth has-Šobe'oth*, on I Sam. VIII, 6f.) who vigorously rejects that interpretation by referring himself to the Jewish tradition, and expressly by Menasseh ben Israel (*Conciliator*, ed. cit. p. 228), who says: »*Haec opinio (sc. Abravanelis) quamvis satis congrua verbis S. Scripturae, a multis tamen accepta non est, quia adversatur sententiae ac traditioni antiquorum.*« Abravanel's interpretation was tacitly accepted by Moses Mendelssohn (*Jerusalem*, Berlin, 1783, II, pp. 117 ff.), and rejected by S. R. Hirsch and by Buber-Rosenzweig. Cp. also Isaak Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung*, Breslau, 1932, pp. 185 f., and Urbach, *loc. cit.* p. 269. (The essay of Heinrich Heinemann in the *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft*, 1916, was not accessible to me.)

⁵⁹ According to Nahmanides.

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say), I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are round about me; *Thou shalt in any wise set a king over thee*. Thou shalt set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set over thee: thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, which is not thy brother.«

According to Abravanel's interpretation, the passage in question would read as follows: »When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein; and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are round about me; *then thou shalt set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose*: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee, which is not thy brother.«

According to the traditional interpretation, the purport of the law, contained in the passage, is that Israel is commanded to institute a king. According to Abravanel's interpretation, its purport is that, *if* Israel wishes to institute a king – and to do this, Israel is by the law implicitly permitted, but permitted only – then Israel may do it only in such and such a manner. Now Abravanel's interpretation, which is directly opposed to that of the Jewish tradition, is in substance identical with that implied in the Vulgate.⁶⁰ Abravanel is, of course, much more explicit than the Vulgate can be.⁶¹ And, apart from this, he goes much
121 further than the Latin translation does. He says, explaining the passage

⁶⁰ »Cum ingressus fueris terram, quam Dominus Deus tuus dabit tibi, et possederis eam, habitaverisque in illa, et dixeris: Constituam super me regem, sicut habent omnes per circuitum nationes; *eum constitues, quem Dominus tuus elegerit de numero fratrum tuorum*....« Cp. also the English translation: »...Thou shalt in any wise set *him* king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose....«

⁶¹ It will be proper to give a more complete (if partially free) rendering of Abravanel's interpretation by putting his explanatory remarks on the biblical words into brackets. He explains: »When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein [i.e. it will be foolish that in the time of the wars, during the conquest of the land, you will not ask for a king; for this would be the most proper time for the need for a king; but after you will possess the land, and you will have divided it, and you will dwell in it in safety, and this will have happened by the providence of God, without there being then a king – then, without any necessity and need whatsoever] thou shalt say, I will set a king over me [namely] like as all the nations that are round about me [i.e. for no other necessity and purpose (but |
121 to assimilate yourselves to the nations of the world); when this will happen],

in question more precisely: »(When thou shalt wish to do this), in spite of its not being proper, (thou mayest not do it but in such and such a manner). This is similar to the section of the law which runs as follows: When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God deliverest them into thine hands... and seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and thou hast a desire unto her... For there the precept is not that he shall desire her, and not that he shall take her to him to wife..., since this is permitted only, and an effect of the wicked inclination. But the precept is that, after the first cohabitation, thou shalt bring her home into thine house... Israel was not commanded in the Torah to ask for a king..., and the king was not necessary and indispensable for the government of their gatherings..., for God was their king truly... Therefore, when Israel asked for a king..., the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and He said: they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them; and Samuel said: ye said unto me, Nay, but a king shall reign over us; when the Lord your God was your king. This shows that the sin consisted in their ›kicking‹ at God's kingship and their choosing a human kingship. For this reason, neither Joshua nor the other Judges instituted a king.«

The final expression of Abravanel's interpretation is that Deut. XVII, 14f. contains a permission given »with regard to the wicked inclination« (*Yešer ha-Ra'*). Now this more precise expression, too, is in substance borrowed from a Christian source. That source is the *Postilla* of Nicolas of Lyra.⁶² Thus | we are entitled to say that Abravanel's

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thou shalt [not] set [him] king over thee [whom you wish, but him] whom the Lord thy God shall choose....« Commentary on I Sam. VIII, 6f. (f. 93, cols. 1–2).

⁶² Nicolas says on Deut. XVII, 14f.: »non est praeceptum, nec simplex concessio, quia sic non peccasset populus Israel petendo regem, cujus contrarium dicitur I Reg. XII: sed est permissio quae est de malo. Bonum enim populi consistebat in hoc, quod solus Deus regnaret super eum, eo quod erat populus peculiaris Dei; veruntamen si importune regem habere vellent, permittebatur eis, sub conditionibus tamen....« This is explained more fully in the *Postilla* on I Reg. VIII: »illud quod dicitur Deut. 17 de constitutione regis ... non fuit concessio proprie dicta, sed magis permissio, sicut repudium uxoris fuit permissum ad duritiam cordis eorum. ...« The comparison shows that Abravanel has merely replaced Nicolas' example by the example of the »beautiful woman«. But the point of view of Abravanel is identical with that of Nicolas. There is one important difference between the Jewish and the Christian commentator: while Abravanel thinks that monarchy is intrinsically bad,

interpretation of Deut. XVII, 14 f., i. e. of the chief biblical passage, or, in other words, that his opinion concerning the incompatibility of mon-

- 122 Nicolas is of the | opinion that monarchy is in principle the best form of government. Nicolas only contests that that which holds true of all other nations, holds equally true of Israel, the nation governed by God. Only this part of Nicolas' argument has been taken over by Abravanel. (Cp. the beginning of Abravanel's discussion concerning monarchy in Israel: »Even if we grant, that the king is most necessary in the nation for the ordering of the political community ... he is not necessary in the nation of Israel. ...«) Nicolas says on I Reg. VIII: »Ad maiorem praedictorum evidentiam quaeritur, utrum filii Israel peccaverint petendo super se regem. Et arguitur quod non, quia petere illud quod est bonum simpliciter, et de dictamine rationis rectae, non est peccatum; gubernatio autem populi per regem est optima, ut dicit Philosophus 3. Politicorum. et per consequens est de dictamine rationis rectae. ... Item illud quod conceditur lege divina licitum est, quia nullum peccatum concedit, sed Deut. 17. c. concedit lex divina filiis Israel constitutionem regis. ... [Notice that even in this »monarchist« objection Deut. XVII, 14 f. is understood to contain a *concessio* only.] Contra infra 12. c. dicitur: Scietis et videbitis. ... Ad hoc dicendum quod, cum regnum sit optima politia, caeterae gentes a filiis Israel petendo vel constituendo super se regem non peccaverunt, sed magis bonum egerunt. Filii autem Israel hoc faciendo peccaverunt. ... Cuius ratio est, quia Deus populum Israel elegit sibi specialem et peculiarem prae caeteris populis ... et idem voluit esse rex immediatus illius populi ... propter quod voluit homines gubernatores illius populi ab ipso immediate institui, tanquam eius vicarii essent, et non reges vel domini: ut patet in Moyse et Josue, et de iudiciis sequentibus. ...« (That Abravanel knew the *Postilla*, is shown by his express quotations from it – see Guttmann, *loc. cit.* p. 46. But, apart from that, that interpretation given by earlier commentators of Deut. XVII, 14 f. (or I Sam. VIII, 6 f.) which he esteems most highly and which he discusses most fully, is the interpretation given by Paulus of Burgos, and this interpretation is to be found in Paulus' *Additiones* to the *Postilla*.) Cp. further Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II, 1, qu. 105, art. 1: »regnum est optimum regimen populi, si non corrumpatur. Sed ... de facili regnum degenerat in tyrannidem ... ideo Dominus a principio (Judaeis) regem non instituit cum plena potestate, sed iudicem et gubernatorem in eorum custodiam; sed postea regem ad petitionem populi quasi indignatus concessit, ut patet per hoc quod dixit ad Samuel I Reg. 8, 7. ...
- 123 Instituit tamen a principio | circa regem instituendum, primo quidem modum eligendi. ... Secundo ordinavit circa reges institutos. ...« The fact that the kings had absolute power, while the power of the judges was more limited, is stressed by Abravanel in the introduction to his commentary on Judges (f. 40, col. 1). Cp. also John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, lib. VIII, cap. 18: »... primi patres et patriarchae vivendi duces optimum naturam secuti sunt. Successerunt duces a Moyse sequentes legem, et iudices qui legis auctoritate regebant populum; et eosdem fuisse legimus sacerdotes. Tandem in furore Domini dati sunt reges, alii quidem boni, alii vero mali ... populus ... a Deo, quem contempserat, sibi regem extorsit ... (Saul) tamen christus Domini dictus est, et tyrannidem

archy with the constitution of Israel, goes immediately back to Christian, not to Jewish sources.

Generally speaking, both the Jewish and the Christian tradition, and in particular both the Jewish and the Christian Middle Ages, were in favour of monarchy. Anti-monarchist statements are, in both traditions, exceptional up to the humanist age. Thus one is at a loss to state which of the two traditions shows a comparatively stronger monarchist (or anti-monarchist) trend than the other. One could, however, dare to make such a statement if it were based on a comparison of comparable magnitudes, i.e. of a Jewish source which is at the same time authoritative and popular, with the corresponding Christian source. Now if we compare the manner in which the Jewish Bible on the one hand (i.e. the Targum Onkelos, the Targum Jonathan, and the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides), and the Christian (Latin) Bible on the other (i.e. the *Glossa interlinearis*, the *Glossa ordinaria*, the *Postilla* of Nicolas of Lyra, and the *Additiones* of Paulus Burgensis) deal with the chief passage, i.e. with the law concerning the institution of a king, we find that the Jewish Bible shows not the slightest sign of an anti-monarchist tendency,⁶³ while the Christian Bible exhibits a definite anti-monarchist trend, based on theocratic assumptions.⁶⁴ The only excep-

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exercens regium non amisit honorem. ...« With this passage, the whole of Abravanel's political teaching should be compared. As regards the later development, I would refer the reader particularly to Milton, *Pro populo Anglicano defensio contra Salmasii Defensionem Regiam*, cap. 2. It is interesting in our connection to observe that, while Salmasius (*Defensio Regia*, cap. 2) makes ample use of the rabbinic interpretations of Deut. XVII, 14 f. (and of I Sam. VIII) for the proof of his royalist thesis, Milton much prefers Josephus to the »tenebrionibus Rabbinis« (cp. on Josephus below, p. 127).

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⁶³ The Targum Onkelos renders the passage literally. The Targum Jonathan renders the words »Thou shalt in any wise set a king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee«, in the following way: »You shall inquire for instruction before the Lord, and afterwards appoint the king over you.« Rashi does not say anything on the passage. Ibn Ezra simply says that the passage expresses a permission, Nahmanides conceives of it as containing a command to ask for a king and to institute a king.

⁶⁴ The *Glossa interlinearis* remarks on »et dixeris«: »Tu non ego,« and on »Constituam super me regem«: »Non Deum sed hominem.« The *Glossa ordinaria* (Augustinus, qu. 26) says: »Quaeri potest cur displicuit populus Deo, cum regem desideravit, cum hic inveniatur esse permissus? Sed intelligendum est merito non fuisse secundum voluntatem Dei, quia hoc fieri non praecepit sed

124 tion to this rule in the Christian Bible | is the explanation of the passage in question given by Paulus of Burgos, i. e. by a baptized Jew. The result of this comparison confirms our impression that the immediate origin of Abravanel's anti-monarchist conclusions from his theocratic premises has to be sought for, not in Jewish, but in Christian sources.

Of Christian origin is, above all, Abravanel's general conception of the government of the Jewish nation. According to him, that government consists of two kinds of governments, of a government human and of a government spiritual or divine. This distinction is simply the Christian distinction between the authority spiritual and the authority temporal. Abravanel further divides each of these two governments into three degrees. As regards the government human, the lowest degree is the »little *Beth-Din*«, i. e. the court of justice of every town. The members of those courts are elected by the people. The second degree of the government human is the »great *Beth-Din*«, i. e. the *Synhedrion* in Jerusalem. The members of the *Synhedrion* are not elected by the people, but nominated either by the king, or, if there is no king, by the president of the *Synhedrion*, after consultation with the other members; the president himself is chosen by the members of the *Synhedrion*. This body, being an image of the seventy elders led by Moses, consists of seventy-one persons. The highest place in human government is occupied by the king. The king is chosen by God, not by the people, who have, therefore, no right whatsoever to rebel against the king or to depose him. The office of the king is not the administration of justice, but, in the first instance, military leadership, and then the extrajudicial punishment of the wicked in cases of urgency. His claim to obedience and honour is stressed by Abravanel scarcely less than it is by Maimonides; in this respect both alike are simply following Jewish tradition.⁶⁵ If one takes
125 into | account Abravanel's criticism of monarchy in general and of monarchy in Israel in particular, one has to define his view concerning the highest degree of human government in the Jewish nation more exactly by saying that the chief of that government is, according to the

124 desiderantibus permisit.« As regards the *Postilla*, see above. Paulus Burgensis says: »Praeceptum istud de constitutione regis non est permissive | intelligendum ... sed est simplex concessio cum conditionibus in litera scriptis. Nec sequitur quod si sit concessio simplex, tunc non peccasset populus Israel petendo regem. Nam petierunt regem aliter quam fuit sibi concessum.«

⁶⁵ Commentary on Deut. XVI, 18–XVII, 1, and on XVII, 8–15 (f. 293, cols. 1–2; f. 294, col. 1; f. 296, cols. 2–3). Cp. commentary on I Kings I (f. 196, col. 4)

original intention of the legislator, not a king properly speaking, but a leader of the kind that Moses and the Judges were. As a matter of fact, Abravanel expressly states that »the first king who reigned over Israel« was Moses.⁶⁶ At any rate, the human government of the Jewish nation, as Abravanel sees it, consists of a monarchic element (Moses and his successors), of an aristocratic element (the Sanhedrin), and of a democratic element (the local judges elected by the people). It is a »mixed« government, in full accordance with the classical doctrine. The immediate source of this view of Abravanel is again a Christian one: Thomas Aquinas' description of the Jewish constitution in the *Summa theologiae*,⁶⁷ which has been altered by Abravanel only in detail. So much about Abravanel's conception of the government human. As regards the government spiritual, he again distinguishes three degrees: the prophet, who is the chief; the priests; and, in the lowest category, the Levites.⁶⁸ The distinction implies that the | hierarchy spiritual, not less than the hierarchy human, leads up to a monarchical head. In this, again, Abravanel is following the teaching of the Christian Middle Ages, according to which the government of the whole church must be monarchical: he merely replaces Petrus (or his successors) by the

and Introduction to commentary on Judges (f. 39, col. 3, f. 40, col. 1). In the | commentary on Deut. XVI, 18–XVII, 13 (f. 293, col. 2 and f. 294, col. 2) Abravanel says, however, that the extraordinary power of jurisdiction belongs, not to the king, but to the *Synhedrion*. Following the ruling of the Jewish tradition, he points out that all appointments in Israel are for life, and, in principle, hereditary (*loc. cit.* f. 293, col. 2). In his »rational« discussion of the best form of human government, he showed a definite preference for short periods of office.

⁶⁶ Commentary on I Kings I (f. 196, col. 4). See also commentary on Exod. XVIII, 13–27 (f. 134, col. 1). *

⁶⁷ II, 1, qu. 105, art. 1. Thomas defines the character of the government instituted by the *lex vetus* by calling that government a »politia bene commixta ex regno, inquantum unus praeest, ex aristocratia, inquantum multi principantur secundum virtutem, et ex democratia, id est, potestate populi, inquantum ex popularibus possunt eligi principes, et ad populum pertinet electio principum. Et hoc fuit institutum secundum legem divinam; nam Moyses et ejus successores (*sc.* Josua, Judices, et reges) gubernabant populum, quasi singulariter omnibus principantes, quod est *quaedam species regni*. Eligebantur autem septuaginta duo seniores secundum virtutem ... et hoc erat aristocraticum. Sed democraticum erat quod isti de omni populo eligebantur. ...« Cp. also the passage from the same article quoted above, p. 121, n. 62.

⁶⁸ Commentary on Deut. XVI, 18–XVII, 1 (f. 293, col. 1), and on XVIII, 1–8 (f. 297, cols. 1–2).

prophet.⁶⁹ The government spiritual, as conceived by Abravanel, is, of course, not purely monarchical; it contains also an aristocratic and, perhaps, a democratic element. This view of the spiritual hierarchy is also borrowed from Christians.⁷⁰ And it is for Abravanel no less a matter of course than it is for the papalist writers among the Christians, that human government, and, in particular, government by kings, which was not instituted by, but extorted from God, is much inferior in dignity to the government spiritual. And, besides, the aristocratic element of the human government of the Jewish nation, the *Synhedrion*, consists, as Abravanel points out, mainly of priests and Levites.⁷¹ The ideal commonwealth, as understood by Abravanel, is governed mainly by prophets and priests; and the ideal leader is for him not, as for Maimonides, a philosopher king, but a priest king.⁷² His political ideal is of a strictly hierocratic character. He was, as far as I know, the first Jew who became deeply influenced by Christian political thought. It deserves to be stressed that he adopted the views of the extreme papalists. He had preferred Christian scholasticism to the philosophy of the Jewish rationalists, and he arrived at a political ideal which was nearer to the ideal of Gregory VII⁷³ and Innocent III than to that of Maimonides. He had undermined Maimonides' political philosophy of the law by contesting its ultimate assumption that the city is »natural«, and by conceiving of the city as a product of human sin, i. e. he had started from unpolitical, and even antipolitical premises, and he arrived at the political creed of clericalism.

But however great the influence of Christian medieval thought on Abravanel's political teaching may have been, that influence scarcely accounts for his so-called republicanism. This part of his political creed

⁶⁹ Cp. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. IV, cap. 76.

⁷⁰ Bellarmin, *De Romano Pontifice*, lib. I, cap. 5: »Jam vero doctores catholici conveniunt omnes, ut regimen ecclesiasticum hominibus a Deo commissum, sit illud quidem monarchicum, sed temperatum ... ex aristocratia et dimocratia.«

⁷¹ Commentary on Deut. XVII, 8–13 (f. 294, col. 2–3).

⁷² Commentary on I Kings I (f. 196, col. 4) and on Exod. XVIII, 13–27 (f. 134, cols. 1–2). Cp. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, lib. VIII, cap. 18 (quoted above, p. 121, n. 62) and Augustinus Triumphus, *Summa de potestate ecclesiastica*, Pt. I, qu. 1, art. 7–8.

⁷³ Cp. with Abravanel's statements those of Gregory VII and others, quoted by Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, III (2nd ed.), pp. 94 and 99.

is not of Christian medieval, but of humanist origin. Humanism means going back from the tradition to the sources of the tradition. *The* sources, however, are for Abravanel, not so much the historians, poets and orators of classical antiquity, but the literal sense of the Bible – and Josephus.⁷⁴ Josephus understood Deut. XVII, 14 f. as permitting only, not commanding, the institution of a king. And he unequivocally states that the government instituted by Moses was an aristocracy as opposed to a monarchy.⁷⁵ Above all, the ἄριστοι, who govern the Jewish state, are identified by him with the priests, whose chief is the high priest.⁷⁶ Thus we conclude that Abravanel's view of the Jewish government as a whole is taken over from Josephus. And by taking into account the result of our previous analysis, we shall sum up by saying that Abravanel restates the aristocratic and anti-monarchist view of Josephus in terms of the Christian distinction between the authority spiritual and the authority temporal.

When speaking of the influence of humanism on Abravanel's political teaching, we have, then, to think not primarily of his »republicanism« – of his admiration for the greatness of republican Rome and for the patriotism of its citizens – which is rather on the surface of his thought. His humanism has indeed hardly anything in common with the »heathenish« humanism of men like Lionardo Bruni. Abravanel is a humanist of the kind represented by Coluccio Salutati, who | might be 128
said to have served as his model.⁷⁷ That is to say, he is a humanist who uses his classical learning to confirm his thoroughly medieval conceptions rather than to free himself from them. He is distinguished from the medieval writers rather by the method which he uses than by the views which he expresses. This method may be called historical.⁷⁸ Abravanel *
tends to pay more attention to the sources of the tradition than to the tradition itself. He often urges the difference between the literal sense of the Bible and the Midrashic interpretations; in doing this, he is guided,

⁷⁴ As regards Abravanel's knowledge of Josephus, see Baer, *loc. cit.* p. 246.

⁷⁵ *Ant.* lib. IV, § 223, and lib. VI, § 35.

⁷⁶ See in particular *Contra Apion.*, lib. II, §§ 185–8 and 193–4, but also *Ant.* lib. IV, §§ 218 (»high priest, prophet, and *Synbedrion*«) and 224.

⁷⁷ Cp. Alfred von Martin, *Mittelalterliche Welt- und Lebensanschauung im Spiegel der Schriften Coluccio Salutatis*, Munich und Berlin, 1913, pp. 22, 61 ff., 82 ff., and 97 ff., and the same author's *Coluccio Salutati's Traktat Vom Tyrannen*, Berlin und Leipzig, 1913, pp. 75 ff.

⁷⁸ With due caution.

not as a medieval rationalist might have been, by an opposition to the »mythical« or »mystical« tendencies of the Midrash – for these tendencies are in full accordance with his own deepest inclinations – but by an interest in establishing the pure, undistorted meaning of the divinely inspired text, by an interest not so much in proving that a certain favoured doctrine is revealed, and therefore true, but to know exactly what Revelation teaches, in order to be able to adopt that teaching, whatever it may be. By preferring in this spirit the sources of the tradition to the tradition itself, he can scarcely avoid the danger of coming into conflict with the teaching of tradition. An important example of that criticism of traditional views, which is based on the return to the sources (both the literal sense of the Bible and Josephus), has attracted our attention in the foregoing pages. To the same connection belongs Abravanel's criticism of certain traditional opinions concerning the authorship of some biblical books, a criticism by which he paved the way for the much more thoroughgoing biblical criticism of Spinoza.⁷⁹ When considering these and similar facts, we may be inclined to complete our earlier statement that Abravanel's thought was fundamentally determined by the Jewish tradition by adding that his teaching tends to be more of a biblicist than of a traditionalist character. But after

129 having granted this, we must stress all the more that | the assumptions of the pre-medieval world to which Abravanel turns back, sometimes by criticizing medieval opinions, are not fundamentally different from the medieval assumptions from which he started. He goes back, it is true, from the monarchist ideal of the Middle Ages to the aristocratic ideal of antiquity. But, as matters stand, this does not mean more than that he goes back from the moderate hierocratic ideal of the Middle Ages to the much more intransigent hierocratic ideal of the period of the Second Temple, as expounded by Josephus. He is distinguished from the Jewish medieval writers by the fact that he is much more clerical than they are.

His descent was, as he believed, royal. His soul was the soul of a priest – of a priest who had not forgotten that the Temple, built by King Solomon in the holy city, was »infinitely inferior in sanctity« to the tabernacle erected by Moses in the desert.⁸⁰ Whatever he may have had to learn from the Cynics or from the Bucolics of antiquity as regards the

⁷⁹ Cp. L. Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, Berlin, 1930, pp. 280 f.

⁸⁰ Commentary on I Kings VI, 1 (f. 217, col. 3).

dubious merits of human arts and city life, his knowledge of the sinful origin of cities, and of towers, and of kingdoms, and of the punishment following the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge was not borrowed from any foreign source: it was the inheritance of his own race which was commanded to be a kingdom of priests.

Marginalien im Handexemplar von Leo Strauss

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(Thomas) ad Politics 311 a

Nietzsche, Unzeitgemässe 300 middle.

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*Sehr drastischer Beweis: Thomas in Pol., lib. II lectio 6. in princ., ja die ganze lectio 6. – 7. – *aber* lect. 8 (ad 1266 b 8).

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*cf. Origines und Abailard in Bezug auf Exodus 11, 2 (Husik)

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cf. Hobbes, Leviathan XIII (56 Abs. 1)

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Albo I 2 end

[Seite 103]

*cf. David Kaufmann, Attributenlehre, Kap. on RMbM in the beginning.

[Seite 104]

*cf. Comm. on Mishna to Sanhedrin X (147 Pocock; Holzer 9 arab. and 10 hebr.)

[Seite 106]

*cf. also Moreh III 45 (422, 9–12)

[Seite 106]

*cf. Moreh II 45 (282, 1–2): King = Messiah

[Seite 107]

*cf. H. Beth ha-bechirah VI 16

Introd. to Comm. on Mishnah (Pocock 31)

[Seite 107, Fußnote 23]

*cf. Introd. to Comm. on Mishna 31 f. Pocock.

[Seite 107, Fußnote 26]

cf. Baron, Historical outlook of RMbM n. 40

cf. MbM, II, 137 n. 3.

cf. Rashi on Psalm 21:2 and Isaiah 9, 5 f.

[Seite 110, Fußnote 34]

*Vergil, 4. Ecloge v. 33 [zu: Exod. XX, 25]

[Seite 110 zu: *city - nation*]

*Azariah de'Rossi translates »*respublica*« in a sentence of Livy by צב (see S. W. Baron, La méthode historique d'Azariah de'Rossi, p. 5 n. 1.)

cf. Hegel, Schriften zur Rechtsphilos. (Übers. aus Plato)

cf. (Ptolemaeus v. Lucca –) Thomas Aqu. De reg. princ. III 3 und 4 (gens steht höher als civitas). Thomas Aqu. I 1 vers. fin.: »provincia« vollkommener als »civitas«.

cf. RÉJ-article (1936) p. 12 [= *Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maïmonide et de Fârâbî*]

Beachte, dass es im bibl. Recht keine Adoption gibt (Baron) – s. dagegen Feigin in Journal for Biblical Literature 193..[Journal of Biblical Literature 1931]

Jewish and Greek City-State: J. C. Todd, *Politics and Religion in Ancient Israel* (London 1904).

[Seite 112, Fußnote 45]

*cf. Ibn Kaspi, ad locum (Mischne Keseph II 199 f.)

[Seite 113]

*cf. Ptolem. of Lucca, De reg. princ. IV 8

Ockham Dialog. I 5 c. 13 und 24

[Seite 113]

*l. c. IV 7–8

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*Ar., Pol. 1272 a 37–39.

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*So schon Spengler, Untergang des Abendlandes, II 513. – Jellinek, Allg. Staatslehre³, 710f. Mommsen, *Abriss*, S. 84.

[Seite 116, Fußnote 54]

*cf. Augustin Civ. Dei XIX 24 und 21 mit III 28 Machiavelli Discorsi I 20f. Patrizius Senensis, De instit. reip.

Bodin. Hobbes.

Mariana De rege I 3 und 8.

Augustin Ep. 138. 2 und 155. 3 – Genesis ad lit. 9. 9.

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*Dies [zu: *permission*] bleibt richtig [darüber von LS vermerkt: ?] – trotz des Hinweises auf Joseph Ibn Kaspi in MGWJ, 1937, 506 (s. meine Noten [cf. *Zu Abravanel's Kritik des Königtums*]). Dann freilich nicht, wenn Kaspis Äusserung *ולמנות מלך ג"כ כענין הקרבן* im Sinn von Moreh III 46 (427, 14–16) verstanden wird. Und so *muss* sie verstanden werden!

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*cf. *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Oxford 336f.

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*Allerdings ist nach Thomas, De reg. princ. I 14 im alten Bund das sacerdotium dem regnum untergeordnet gewesen (weil es in ihm, zum Unterschied vom neuen, um bona terrena ging) – also: Abravanel christianisiert das Judentum.

[Seite 125, Fußnote 66]

cf. RbM, H. Beth ha-bechirah VI 11: *ומשה רבנו מלך היה* – Comm. on Mishna Schebuot II 2.

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cf. p. 81 above [zu: *historical*].